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THE NUMBER OF SOLUTIONS OF THE CONGRUENCE

$$y^2 \equiv x^4 - a \pmod{p}$$

by Surjit SINGH and A. R. RAJWADE

1. INTRODUCTION

The object of this paper is to prove the following theorem.

THEOREM. *Let a be an integer not divisible by a given prime p . Then the number of solutions of the congruence $y^2 \equiv x^4 - a \pmod{p}$ is*

$$\begin{cases} p - 1 & \text{if } p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}. \\ p - (a/\pi)_4 \bar{\pi} - (a/\bar{\pi})_4 \pi - 1 & \text{if } p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}. \end{cases}$$

where $(\frac{\cdot}{\cdot})_4$ is the biquadratic residue symbol and $p = \pi \bar{\pi}$ is the factorization of p in the ring $Z[i]$ of the Gaussian integers, π and $\bar{\pi}$ being both normalized $\equiv 1 \pmod{2(1+i)}$.

Morlaye shows (see [4] Proposition 1) that if N is the number of solutions of the congruence $y^2 \equiv x^3 - ax \pmod{p}$ and N' the number of solution of the congruence $y^2 \equiv x^4 - a \pmod{p}$ then $N = N' + 1$. This is a short proposition for the case $p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$ and so our theorem gets the number of solutions of

$$y^2 \equiv x^3 - ax \pmod{p}$$

by yet another elementary method. This latter equation: $y^2 = x^3 - ax$ is the elliptic curve with complex multiplication by $\sqrt{-1}$. (See also a remark by Swinnerton-Dyer in [1]). A proof of the latter result is also given in [2] and [5]. These proofs, however, are not elementary.

We note here that both N and N' can be computed trivially for the case $p \equiv 3 \pmod{4}$.

To get N we proceed as follows:

Case 1. a is a quadratic non-residue mod p . Then corresponding to $y = 0$, there exist only one x viz $x = 0$ satisfying

$$y^2 \equiv x(x^2 - a) \pmod{p}$$

since $x^2 - a \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$ is not solvable. This gives one solution $(0, 0)$. Let now $x = \pm 1, \pm 2, \dots, \pm \frac{p-1}{2}$, be a complete non-zero residue system mod p . Of $x^3 - ax$ and $(-x)^3 - a(-x) = -(x^3 - ax)$ one is a quadratic residue and the other a non-residue since -1 is a non-residue, p being $\equiv 3 \pmod{4}$. Hence as x takes the values $\pm 1, \pm 2, \dots, \pm \frac{p-1}{2}$, $x^3 - ax$ becomes a quadratic residue $\frac{p-1}{2}$ times (perhaps with repetitions) and a non-residue $\frac{p-1}{2}$ times. Each time it is a quadratic residue, we get 2 solutions. Hence there exist $p-1$ solutions, and together with $(0, 0)$ gives p solutions as required.

Case 2. a is a quadratic residue mod p , that is there exists an x_0 such that $x_0^2 \equiv a \pmod{p}$. Then corresponding to $y = 0$ there exist 3 solutions, $(0, 0), (x_0, 0), (-x_0, 0)$. Let now $x = \pm 1, \pm 2, \dots, \pm \frac{p-1}{2}$, but $\neq \pm x_0$ (or 0) (all together $p-3$ values). As above $x^3 - ax$ becomes a quadratic residue exactly $\frac{p-3}{2}$ times and so there exists $p-3$ solutions, which together with $(0, 0), (\pm x_0, 0)$ gives p solutions as required. To get N' we note that in this case the biquadratic residues of p are the same as quadratic residues. Hence the congruence can be written as

$$y^2 \equiv x^2 - a \pmod{p}$$

or $(x+y)(x-y) \equiv a \pmod{p}$

or $u.v \equiv a \pmod{p}$

which has $p-1$ solutions as required. For the case $p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$ we shall use results from cyclotomy for the factorization $p-1 = 4f$.

2. THE CONGRUENCE $y^2 \equiv (x^4 - a) \pmod{p}$

Let $\left(\frac{t}{p}\right)$ be the Legendre symbol. The number of solutions of $y^2 \equiv x^4$

$$- a \pmod{p} \text{ equals } \sum_x \left[1 + \left(\frac{x^4 - a}{p}\right) \right] = p + \sum_x \left(\frac{x^4 - a}{p}\right) = p + S.$$

To get S we define first the biquadratic character χ as follows:

Let g be a primitive root mod p . Then for any integer $m (\neq 0)$ there exists a positive integer v such that $m \equiv g^v (p)$. We put $\chi(m) = (i)^v$ where $i = \sqrt{-1}$ and put $\chi(0) = 0$. This defines χ . We now have

$$\begin{aligned} S &= \sum_y [1 + \chi(y) + \chi^2(y) + \chi^3(y)] \left(\frac{y-a}{p}\right) \\ &= \sum_y \chi(y) \left(\frac{y-a}{p}\right) + \sum_y \chi^2(y) \left(\frac{y-a}{p}\right) + \sum_y \chi^3(y) \left(\frac{y-a}{p}\right). \end{aligned}$$

Setting $y = -az$ we get:

$$\begin{aligned} S &= \left(\frac{-a}{p}\right) \left[\sum_{\text{all } z} \chi(-a) \chi(z) \left(\frac{z+1}{p}\right) + \sum_{\text{all } z} \chi^2(-a) \chi^2(z) \left(\frac{z+1}{p}\right) \right. \\ &\quad \left. + \sum_{\text{all } z} \overline{\chi(-a)} \overline{\chi(z)} \left(\frac{z+1}{p}\right) \right], \end{aligned}$$

since $\chi^3(m) = \overline{\chi(m)}$ for all integers m .

Now we look at the sum

$$\sum \chi(z) \left(\frac{z+1}{p}\right).$$

This equals

$$\sum_{z+1 = \text{square}} \chi(z) - \sum_{z+1 = \text{not square}} \chi(z).$$

But

$$0 = \sum_{z+1 = \text{square}} \chi(z) + \sum_{z+1 \neq \text{square}} \chi(z) + \chi(-1).$$

Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{z+1 = \text{square not zero}} \chi(z) &= \frac{1}{2} \sum_{u \neq 0} \chi(u^2 - 1) = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{u \neq 0} \chi(u+1) \chi(u-1) \\ &= \frac{1}{2} \left[\sum_{\text{all } u} \chi(u+1) \chi(u-1) - \chi(-1) \right]. \end{aligned}$$

Now put $u = 2v + 1$.

$$\text{Therefore } \sum_{z+1 = \text{square not zero}} \chi(z) = \frac{1}{2} \left[\chi(4) \sum_{\text{all } v} \chi(v) \chi(v+1) - \chi(-1) \right].$$

$$\text{Hence } \sum_{\text{all } z} \chi(z) \left(\frac{z+1}{p}\right) = \chi(4) \sum_{\text{all } v} \chi(v) \chi(v+1).$$

Similarly for χ^2 and $\bar{\chi}$ and therefore we get

$$\begin{aligned} S &= \left(\frac{-a}{p}\right) \left[\chi(-4a) \sum_{\text{all } v} \chi(v) \chi(v+1) + \bar{\chi}(-4a) \sum_{\text{all } v} \bar{\chi}(v) \bar{\chi}(v+1) \right. \\ &\quad \left. + \chi^2(-4a) \sum_{\text{all } v} \chi^2(v) \chi^2(v+1) \right]. \end{aligned}$$

3. CYCLOTOMY FOR $p = 1 + 4f$.

Let g be a primitive root mod p which we have already fixed in § 2. Divide the non-zero residues mod p into four classes A_0, A_1, A_2, A_3 by putting $m \equiv g^v$ in A_i if $v \equiv i \pmod{4}$. The cyclotomic constants (h, k) ($0 \leq h, k \leq 3$) are defined to be the number of values of $y, 1 \leq y \leq p - 2$ for which

$$(3.1) \quad y \equiv g^{4t+h} \pmod{p}, \quad 1 + y \equiv g^{4s+k} \pmod{p}$$

[i.e. for which $y \in A_h, 1 + y \in A_k$].

As results differ in the two cases $p \equiv 1 \pmod{8}$ and $p \equiv 5 \pmod{8}$ we look at these cases separately.

Case 1: $p \equiv 1 \pmod{8}$. In this case $p = 1 + 4f$ where f is even. We know [3] that

$$(3.2) \quad \begin{cases} (h, k) = (k, h) \\ (h, k) = (-h, k-h) \end{cases}$$

Thus $(1, 2) = (2, 3) = (1, 3); (1, 1) = (0, 3); (2, 2) = (0, 2); (3, 3) = (0, 1)$. Therefore of the 16 cyclotomic constants which may be written as a (4×4) matrix, only five are different and we have

$$(3.3) \quad \begin{bmatrix} (0, 0) & (1, 0) & (2, 0) & (3, 0) \\ (0, 1) & (1, 1) & (2, 1) & (3, 1) \\ (0, 2) & (1, 2) & (2, 2) & (3, 2) \\ (0, 3) & (1, 3) & (2, 3) & (3, 3) \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} A & D & C & B \\ D & B & E & E \\ C & E & C & E \\ B & E & E & D \end{bmatrix}$$

Consider the numbers $1, 2, \dots, p - 1$. Each $y \in A_0$ (there are f such y 's) except the last (i.e. $p - 1$ which is in A_0 in this case) is followed by $y + 1$ which may belong to A_0, A_1, A_2 or A_3 .

Similarly each $y \in A_1$ without exception is followed by $y + 1$ which may belong to A_0, A_1, A_2 or A_3 and so on. Hence we get

$$(3.4) \quad A + D + C + B = f - 1$$

$$(3.5) \quad D + B + 2E = f$$

$$(3.6) \quad 2C + 2E = f.$$

Case 2: $p \equiv 5 \pmod{8}$. In this case $p = 4f + 1$ where f is odd. Now look at the congruence

$$(3.1)' \quad 1 + g^{4t+h} + g^{4s+k} \equiv 0 \pmod{p}.$$

Denote the number of solutions of (3.1)' by $\{h, k\}$. Then clearly $\{h, k\} = \{k, h\}$ and the following relations are known [3]

$$(3.2)' \quad \begin{cases} \{-h, k-h\} = \{h, k\} \text{ for any } f \text{ even or odd} \\ \{h, k\} = (h, k+2) \text{ for } f \text{ odd.} \end{cases}$$

Thus $\{1, 0\} = \{3, 3\}$; $\{3, 0\} = \{1, 1\}$; $\{2, 0\} = \{2, 2\}$ and $\{3, 1\} = \{1, 2\} = \{3, 2\}$.

Therefore the matrix of the cyclotomic constants $\{h, k\}$ can be written as

$$(3.3)' \quad \begin{bmatrix} \{0, 0\} & \{1, 0\} & \{2, 0\} & \{3, 0\} \\ \{0, 1\} & \{1, 1\} & \{2, 1\} & \{3, 1\} \\ \{0, 2\} & \{1, 2\} & \{2, 2\} & \{3, 2\} \\ \{0, 3\} & \{1, 3\} & \{2, 3\} & \{3, 3\} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} L & M & N & R \\ M & R & S & S \\ N & S & N & S \\ R & S & S & M \end{bmatrix}$$

Since f is odd, $p - 1$ belongs to A_2 hence in this case as before

$$\begin{aligned} (0, 1) + (0, 1) + (0, 2) + (0, 3) &= f \\ (1, 0) + (1, 1) + (1, 2) + (1, 3) &= f \\ (2, 0) + (2, 1) + (2, 2) + (2, 3) &= f - 1. \end{aligned}$$

Now using (3.2)' and (3.3)' we get

$$(3.4)' \quad L + M + N + R = f$$

$$(3.5)' \quad R + M + 2S = f$$

$$(3.6)' \quad 2N + 2S = f - 1.$$

4. THE JACOBI FUNCTION

Let α be any root ($\neq 1$) of $\alpha^{p-1} = 1$. Write

$$(4.1) \quad F(\alpha) = \sum_{k=0}^{p-2} \alpha^k \zeta^{qk} \text{ where } \zeta^p = 1 \text{ and } \zeta \neq 1.$$

We shall employ a special case of the function (4.1) due to Jacobi. Let $p = ef + 1$ and β be a primitive e -th root of unity. In (4.1) take $\alpha = \beta^n$ (n -integer). We know ([3] page 395) that if e does not divide n then

$$(4.2) \quad F(\beta^n) F(\beta^{-n}) = (-1)^{nf} \cdot p$$

and if we put

$$(4.3) \quad R(n, m) = \frac{F(\beta^n) F(\beta^m)}{F(\beta^{m+n})},$$

then

$$(4.4) \quad R(n, m) = \sum_{h=0}^{e-1} \beta^{nh} \sum_{k=0}^{e-1} \beta^{-(m+n)k} (h, k).$$

From (4.2) and (4.3) it follows that if e does not divide m, n and $m + n$ then

$$(4.5) \quad R(n, m) R(-n, -m) = p$$

and from (4.4) it follows that $R(-n, -m)$ is got from $R(n, m)$ by replacing β by β^{-1} . Let now $e = 4$ and $\beta = \sqrt{-1}$; using (4.4) we get

$$R(1, 1) = (A - B - C - D + 2E) + i(2D - 2B) \text{ in case } p \equiv 1 \pmod{8}$$

$$R(1, 1) = (L - M - R - N + 2S) + i(2M - 2R) \text{ in case } p \equiv 5 \pmod{8}.$$

5. PROOF COMPLETED

If $p \equiv 1 \pmod{4}$ then p splits in $Z[i]$ as $p = \pi \bar{\pi}$ where π is prime in $Z[i]$.

Case 1: $p \equiv 1 \pmod{8}$.

$$\begin{aligned} \sum_{\text{all } v} \chi(v) \chi(v+1) &= \sum_{v \in A_0, A_1, A_2, A_3} \chi(v) \chi(v+1) = \sum_{A_0} + \sum_{A_1} + \sum_{A_2} + \sum_{A_3} \\ &= 1[A + Di - C - Bi] + i[D + Bi - E - Ei] \\ &\quad - 1[C + Ei - C - Ei] - i[B + Ei - E - Di] \\ &= [A - B - C - D + 2E] + i[2D - 2B] \\ (5.1) \quad &= R(1, 1) = (-2f + 8(1, 2) - 1) - 2i[D - B] \end{aligned}$$

where $R(1, 1) \equiv -1 \pmod{2(1+i)}$ (as $D - B = f - 2B - 2E$ by (3.5))

$$\begin{aligned} \text{and } \sum_{\text{all } v} \chi^2(v) \chi^2(v+1) &= (A - D + C - B) - (D - B + E - E) \\ &\quad + (C - E + C - E) - (B - E + E - D) \\ &= A + 3C - D - 2E - B = -1, \end{aligned}$$

by (3.4)

Therefore we have

$$S = \left(\frac{-a}{p}\right) [\chi(-4a) R(1, 1) + \bar{\chi}(-4a) \overline{R(1, 1)} + \chi^2(-4a)(-1)].$$

We put $\pi = -R(1, 1)$, then $\pi \equiv +1 \pmod{2(1+i)}$.

$$\text{Therefore } S = \left(\frac{-a}{p}\right) [-\chi(-4a)\pi - \bar{\chi}(-4a)\bar{\pi} - \chi^2(-4a)].$$

Let g be the primitive root mod p which we have already fixed in § 2. We now have two possibilities:

$$(i) \quad \left(\frac{g}{\pi}\right)_4 = i \quad \text{i.e.} \quad \left(\frac{d}{\pi}\right)_4 = \chi(d) \text{ for all } d.$$

$$(ii) \quad \left(\frac{g}{\pi}\right)_4 = -i \quad \text{i.e.} \quad \left(\frac{d}{\pi}\right)_4 = \bar{\chi}(d) \text{ for all } d.$$

Let $\chi(d) = \left(\frac{d}{\pi^*}\right)_4$ where $\pi^* = \pi$ or $\bar{\pi}$.

We shall show that $\pi^* = \pi$. We have

$$\begin{aligned} \pi &= -\sum \chi(v)\chi(v+1) \equiv -\sum_0^{p-1} v^{\frac{1}{4}(p-1)}(v+1)^{\frac{1}{4}(p-1)} \pmod{\pi^*} \\ &\equiv -[v^{\frac{1}{4}(p-1)}(1 + \frac{1}{4}(p-1)v + \dots + v^{\frac{1}{4}(p-1)})] \pmod{\pi^*}. \end{aligned}$$

In the last sum each term is divisible by $p = \pi\bar{\pi}$, because we know that $\sum_v v^k \equiv 0 \pmod{p}$ unless $p-1/k$. Hence the right hand side of the above is congruent to zero mod π^* . Hence $\pi \equiv 0 \pmod{\pi^*}$ giving $\pi = \pi^*$.

Therefore

$$\begin{aligned} S &= -\left(\frac{-a}{p}\right)\left(\frac{-4a}{\pi}\right)_4 \pi - \left(\frac{-a}{p}\right)\left(\frac{-4a}{\bar{\pi}}\right)_4 \bar{\pi} - \left(\frac{-a}{p}\right)\left(\frac{-4a}{\pi}\right)_4^2 \\ &= -\left(\frac{-4a}{\pi}\right)_4^3 \pi - \left(\frac{-4a}{\bar{\pi}}\right)_4^3 \bar{\pi} - 1 = -\left(\frac{a}{\pi}\right)_4^3 \pi - \left(\frac{a}{\bar{\pi}}\right)_4^3 \bar{\pi} - 1 \\ &= -\left(\frac{a}{\pi}\right)_4 \pi - \left(\frac{a}{\bar{\pi}}\right)_4 \bar{\pi} - 1, \end{aligned}$$

using (i) $\left(\frac{d}{p}\right) = \left(\frac{d}{\pi}\right)_4^2 = \left(\frac{d}{\bar{\pi}}\right)_4^2$

(ii) $\left(\frac{d}{\pi}\right)_4^3 = \left(\frac{d}{\bar{\pi}}\right)_4$

(iii) $\left(\frac{-4}{\pi}\right)_4 = \left(\frac{-4}{\bar{\pi}}\right)_4 = 1$ since $-4 = (1+i)^4$ — a fourth power.

This gives the required value of S .

Case 2: $p \equiv 5 \pmod{8}$. In this case as before

$$\begin{aligned} \sum \chi(v) \chi(v+1) &= [N - L + R + M - 2S] + i[2R - 2M] \\ &= -R(1, 1) \text{ (see [3])} \end{aligned}$$

and $\sum \chi^2(v) \chi^2(v+1) = 3N + L - 2S - R - M = -1$,
using (3.4)', (3.5)', (3.6)', and therefore

$$S = \left(\frac{-a}{p}\right) \left[-\chi(-4a) R(1, 1) - \bar{\chi}(-4a) \overline{R(1, 1)} - 1 \cdot \chi^2(-4a) \right].$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Here } R(1, 1) &= (L - M - R - N + 2S) + i(2M - 2R) \\ &= (-2f + 8(1, 0) + 1) + i(2M - 2R) \text{ (see [3])}. \end{aligned}$$

We put $R(1, 1) = \pi$, then $\pi \equiv 1 \pmod{(2+2i)}$ and we get

$$S = \left(\frac{-a}{p}\right) \left[-\chi(-4a) \pi - \bar{\chi}(-4a) \bar{\pi} - \chi^2(-4a) \right]$$

and as before this

$$= -\left(\frac{a}{\bar{\pi}}\right)_4 \pi - \left(\frac{a}{\pi}\right)_4 \bar{\pi} - 1,$$

as required. This completes the proof of the Theorem.

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